

## **FirstNet board approves spectrum-lease agreement with state of Texas**

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson and Jill Nolin

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[FirstNet](#) board members approve a three-year spectrum-management-lease agreement (SMLA) with the state of Texas, providing some spectral stability to the public-safety

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network deployed in

[Harris](#)

County, Texas—the first such operational network to be established in the United States.

The SMLA with Texas is “similar in content and focus” to other SMLAs approved by FirstNet, FirstNet Chairwoman Sue Swenson said during a special meeting of the FirstNet board.

“Texas can move on,” Swenson said at the conclusion of the meeting, which was conducted via teleconference.

Harris County has been operating its public-safety LTE network—built by [Motorola Solutions](#)—for more than two years on 700 MHz spectrum that currently is licensed to FirstNet. During that time, the

[FCC](#)

repeatedly has granted the state of Texas—on behalf of Harris County—special temporary authority (STA) to continue network operations, the latest of which was set to expire on Aug. 24.

While FirstNet has supported the STA applications by the state of Texas, officials in the state and in Harris County wanted an SMLA agreement with FirstNet to provide more long-term certainty about the county’s ability to continue operating the network and pursue possible expansion plans. Representatives of Texas and FirstNet negotiated for more than a year before reaching a deal.

“The goal is to have a three-year SMLA to allow the lessons learned to be continually gained from this system and to make sure that we are leveraging the investment that has been put in place with the Harris County, Texas, system,” FirstNet Acting General Manager TJ Kennedy

said during today's meeting. "The overall goal is to make sure that this is leveraged and that FirstNet can have all of the good lessons learned that will come from having this network and continue to expand how it is used by the first responders in Texas."

Todd Early, deputy assistant director at the Texas Department of Public Safety and the state's single point of contact (SPOC) for FirstNet, echoed this sentiment.

"The state of Texas is pleased to have reached an agreement with FirstNet on the spectrum lease," Early said in a prepared statement. "Both sides have worked very hard to reach an agreement that will benefit first responders in Texas and provide key lessons learned to FirstNet regarding the buildout of the nationwide public-safety broadband network."

"We appreciate the work and dedication of the entire FirstNet team and support of the board in reaching this agreement that supports the planning, investments, build-out and commitment made by Harris County ITC, the Harris County Judge's Office and Commissioners Court, Houston Ship Channel Security District and the State of Texas."

With the assured access to spectrum through the SMLA, Harris County will be able to expand its public-safety LTE network from 14 sites to 93 sites, Early said during an interview with [IWC](#)  
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After Congress passed legislation establishing FirstNet in February 2012, the [National Telecommunications and Information Administration](#) (NTIA)

[instituted a freeze](#) on all public-safety LTE deployments until the FirstNet board was created and decided what policies would be appropriate for jurisdictions attempting early deployments of public-safety LTE.

In early 2013, the FirstNet board—led by Swenson, who was just a board member at the time but charged with heading spectrum-lease deals—began negotiating with these "early mover" jurisdictions in an effort to reach spectrum-lease agreements. The [first spectrum-lease](#)

[agreement was with LA-RICs in August 2013](#)

, and deals with the state of New Mexico, the state of New Jersey and Adams County, Colo., followed in the fall of 2013. Adams County

[launched its public-safety LTE network](#)

in June.

All previous spectrum-lease agreements approved by FirstNet were with jurisdictions that received federal funding through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) administered by NTIA. The Harris County deployment was different, in that its federal funding came from sources other than BTOP.

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